

Creating an Inclusive Workplace for the LGBTQIA+ Community

In Australia, 3.6% of males and 3.4% of females identified as LGBTQIA+ in 2024, a total of 740,800 people (an increase of 140,000 compared to 2016). Despite this growing representation, the LGBTQIA+ community still suffers at the hand of discrimination and hate, resulting in high numbers of mental health issues, substance abuses and suicides.

THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Anyone can experience a mental health problem. But those who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely to develop problems like:

1. **Low self-esteem** — How we value and perceive ourselves. It's based on our opinions and beliefs about ourselves, which can sometimes feel really difficult to change.
2. **Depression** — A low mood that lasts for a long time, and affects your everyday life. In its mildest form, depression can mean just being in low spirits. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening because it can make you feel suicidal.
3. **Anxiety and social anxiety** — What we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid — particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future.
4. **Eating problems and disorders** — Not just how much you eat, but also the way you eat, and how you think about food.
5. **Drugs and alcohol addiction** — A dependance on drugs and alcohol as a way to 'cope' with your feelings.
6. **Suicidal feelings (ideation)** — This can mean having abstract thoughts about ending your life or feeling that people would be better off without you. It can also mean thinking about methods of suicide or making clear plans to take your own life.
7. **Other mental health problems** — These can include anger issues, panic attacks, bipolar disorder and personality disorders.

Being LGBTQIA+ does not cause these problems. The reasons why those who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely to suffer from them are complicated and individual. But it is usually to do with experiencing things like:

- Homophobia
- Biphobia and transphobia
- Social stigma and/or discrimination
- Difficult experiences coming out
- Social isolation, exclusion and rejection from family and the community

THE ROLE OF THE WORKPLACE

The workplace is a place we spend most of our adult lives and, as a result, it plays a key role in creating equality and a more inclusive world for LGBTQIA+ people. Here are a few ways employees and employers can achieve an inclusive workplace:

1. If you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with this world, educate yourself on the LGBTQIA+ population, rather than leaning on what you've learnt from bathroom jokes, religious condemnations or media stereotypes.
2. Raise awareness among employees that June is LGBTQIA+ Pride Month by displaying posters, sending memos or making announcements.
3. Be sensitive and respectful to all gender orientations and identities and don't make assumptions. For example, if asking a female colleague: "Who will drive you home?" And the answer is: "my partner", don't assume the partner is a "he" by asking "What's his name?" This common assumption continues to be made by people in the workplace and puts LGBTQIA+ clients and workers



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in the awkward position of having to correct you for your assumption, and making you feel bad for making the assumption.

4. Some employees may opt to use gender expansive pronouns such as 'they', 'them' and 'theirs' instead of, or as well as, 'he', 'him' and 'his' or 'she', 'her' and 'hers'. Although you may feel it personally unnecessary to do so, and it may even make you feel a little uncomfortable at first, sharing your pronouns helps raise awareness and acceptance of different gender identities, including non-binary.
5. Speak out if a co-worker uses offensive verbal language, jokes about an LGBTQIA+ person, or displays any other homophobic behaviour towards an employee in your workplace. It's important to let the person know that such behaviour is inappropriate.
6. Make sure your employee policies are up to date and that your company specifically references sexual orientation and includes all chosen genders and pronouns in anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies.
7. If your company has a public-facing space, consider including a welcoming sign at the entrance of your organisation that welcomes people of difference and diversity.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Dealing with mental health issues as a member of the LGBTQIA+ can be personal and require specialised support. That is why we offer our customers a specialist LGBTQIA+ helpline that provides clients with specialist consultants providing support across issues specific to the LGBTQIA+ community. We have consultants who have lived experience and who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Call one of our friendly team on 1300 687 327 to learn more or get in contact with a mental health professional.



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